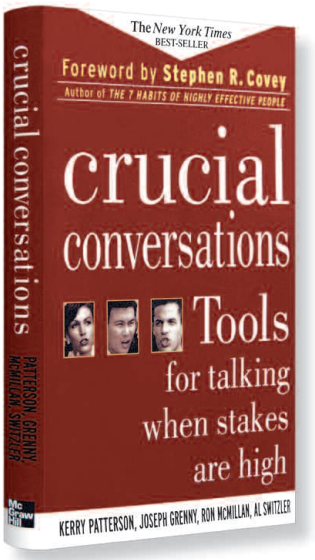
SOUNDVIEW Executive Book Summaries®
www.summary.com

Crucial Conversations

Tools for Talking When Stakes Are High


The New York Times BEST-SELLER
Foreword by Stephen R. Covey
Author of THE 7 HABITS OF HIGHLY EFFECTIVE PEOPLE
crucial conversations
Tools for talking when stakes are high
KERRY PATTERSON, JOSEPH GRENNY, RON MCMILLAN, AL SWITZLER
crucial conversations
PATTERSON, GRENNY, MCMILLAN, SWITZLER

by Kerry Patterson, Joseph Grenny, Ron McMillan and Al Switzler

THE SUMMARY IN BRIEF

Relationships are the priority of life, and conversations help us care for our relationships with talking and listening. The quality of your life comes out of the quality of your dialogues and conversations. *Crucial Conversations* by Kerry Patterson, Joseph Grenny, Ron McMillan and Al Switzler — the founders of VitalSmarts — helps you think about what you really want to say.

With structure and wit, this best-selling book provides readers with a way to improve on the most fundamental element of organizational learning and growth — honest, unencumbered dialogue between individuals.

The authors address the No. 1 reason managers and executives get derailed and offer helpful guidance on how to operate in a fast-paced, results-oriented environment. They provide readers with the tools to handle life's most difficult and important conversations.

This summary describes how anyone can master the skills of crucial conversations at home, work and play. The skills it delivers offer new techniques for working together in ways that enable us to succeed.

You'll learn how to transform crucial conversations from frightening events into interactions that yield success and results. You'll never have to worry about another conversation again, thanks to the most important set of skills you'll ever master.

IN THIS SUMMARY, YOU WILL LEARN:

- How to prepare for high-stakes situations with a proven technique.
- How to transform anger and hurt feelings into powerful dialogue.
- How to make it safe to talk about almost anything.
- How to be persuasive, not abrasive.
- How new techniques, skills and tools work together to enable successful crucial conversations.

CONTENTS

What's a Crucial Conversation? Page 2
Mastering Crucial Conversations Pages 2, 3
Start With Heart Page 3
Learn to Look Pages 3, 4
Make It Safe Pages 4, 5
Master My Stories Page 5
Explore Others' Paths Pages 5, 6
Move to Action Pages 6, 7
Putting It All Together Page 7
Change Your Life Page 8

Published by Soundview Executive Book Summaries, P.O. Box 1053, Concordville, PA 19331 USA
© 2008 Soundview Executive Book Summaries • All rights reserved. Reproduction in whole or part is prohibited. Concentrated Knowledge™ for the Busy Executive • www.summary.com
April 2008 • Order # TFS-30C

books24x7 a SkillSoft Company

THE COMPLETE SUMMARY: **CRUCIAL CONVERSATIONS**

by Kerry Patterson, Joseph Grenny, Ron McMillan and Al Switzler

The authors: Kerry Patterson, Joseph Grenny, Ron McMillan and Al Switzler are founders of VitalSmarts and leading authorities in organizational effectiveness and leadership. Their worldwide clients include 300 of the *Fortune* 500 companies. They are the co-authors of *The Balancing Act: Mastering the Competing Demands of Leadership* and *Crucial Confrontations.* They have also co-developed dozens of training programs.

Crucial Conversations by Kerry Patterson, Joseph Grenny, Ron McMillan and Al Switzler. Copyright © 2002 by Kerry Patterson, Joseph Grenny, Ron McMillan and Al Switzler. Summarized by permission of the publisher McGraw-Hill. $16.95, 240 pages, ISBN 0-07-140194-4.

Summary copyright © 2008 by Soundview Executive Book Summaries, www.summary.com, 1-800-SUMMARY, 1-610-558-9495.

What's a Crucial Conversation?

A crucial conversation is a discussion between two or more people where stakes are high, opinions vary and emotions run strong.

The effects of conversations gone bad can be both devastating and far reaching. Research has shown that strong relationships, careers, organizations and communities all draw from the same source of power — the ability to talk openly about high-stakes, emotional, controversial topics.

Masters of Crucial Conversations

Twenty-five years of research with 20,000 people and hundreds of organizations has taught experts that individuals who are the most influential — who can get things done and *at the same time* build on relationships — are those who master their crucial conversations.

People who routinely hold crucial conversations and hold them well are able to express controversial and even risky opinions in a way that gets heard. Their bosses, peers and direct reports listen without becoming defensive or angry.

Improve Your Organization and Health

In the *best* companies, everyone holds everyone else accountable — regardless of level or position. The path to high productivity passes not through a static system but through face-to-face conversations at all levels.

The ability to hold crucial conversations also has an impact on your personal health. The evidence is mounting every day. The negative feelings we hold in, the emotional pain we suffer and the constant battering we endure as we stumble our way through unhealthy conversations slowly eat away at our health. In some cases, the impact of failed conversations leads to minor problems. In others, it results in disaster. In all cases, failed conversations never make us happier, healthier or better off. ●

Mastering Crucial Conversations

"Dialogue" is the free flow of meaning between two or more people. Each of us enters conversations with our own opinions, feelings, theories and experiences about the topic at hand. This unique combination of thoughts and feelings makes up our personal pool of meaning. This pool not only informs us but also propels our every action.

When two or more of us enter *crucial* conversations, by definition we don't share the same pool. Our opinions differ.

Filling the Pool of Shared Meaning

People who are skilled at dialogue do their best to make it safe for everyone to add their meaning to the *shared* pool — even ideas that at first glance appear controversial, wrong or at odds with their own beliefs. Now, obviously, they don't agree with every idea; they simply do their best to ensure that all ideas find their way into the open.

As the Pool of Shared Meaning grows, it helps people in two ways. First, as individuals are exposed to more accurate and relevant information, they make better choices. In a very real sense, the Pool of Shared Meaning is a measure of a group's IQ. The larger the shared pool, the smarter the decisions. And even though many people may be involved in a choice, when people openly and freely share ideas, the increased time investment is more than offset by the quality of the decision.

On the other hand, we've all seen what happens when the shared pool is dangerously shallow. When people

1-800-SUMMARY
service@summary.com

Published by Soundview Executive Book Summaries (ISSN 0747-2196), P.O. Box 1053, Concordville, PA 19331 USA, a division of Concentrated Knowledge Corp. Published monthly. Subscriptions: $209 per year in the United States, Canada and Mexico, and $295 to all other countries. Periodicals postage paid at Concordville, Pa., and additional offices.
Postmaster: Send address changes to Soundview, P.O. Box 1053, Concordville, PA 19331. Copyright © 2008 by Soundview Executive Book Summaries.
Available formats: Summaries are available in print, audio and electronic formats. To subscribe, call us at 1-800-SUMMARY (610-558-9495 outside the United States and Canada), or order on the Internet at www.summary.com. Multiple-subscription discounts and corporate site licenses are also available.

Rebecca S. Clement, Publisher; **Sarah T. Dayton**, Editor In Chief; **Melissa Ward**, Managing Editor; **Christine Wright**, Senior Graphic Designer; **Chris Lauer**, Contributing Editor

purposefully withhold meaning from one another, individually *smart* people can do collectively *stupid* things.

Better Choices

Not only does a shared pool help individuals make better choices, but since the meaning is *shared*, people willingly act on whatever decisions they make. As people sit through an open discussion where ideas are shared, they take part in the free flow of meaning. Eventually they understand why the shared solution is the best solution, and they're committed to act.

Conversely, when people aren't involved, when they sit back quietly during touchy conversations, they're rarely committed to the final decision. Since their ideas remain in their heads and their opinions never make it into the pool, they end up quietly criticizing and passively resisting. Worse still, when others force their ideas into the pool, people have a harder time accepting the information.

The time you spend upfront establishing a shared pool of meaning is more than paid for by faster, more committed action later on. ●

Start With Heart

How do you encourage the flow of meaning in the face of differing opinions and strong emotions? The truth is people *can* change. But it requires work. You can't simply drink a magic potion and walk away renewed. Instead, you'll need to take a long, hard look at yourself.

In fact, this is the first principle of dialogue: Start with Heart — that is, your *own* heart. If you can't get yourself right, you'll have a hard time getting dialogue right. When conversations become crucial, you'll resort to the forms of communication that you've grown up with — debate, silent treatment, manipulation and so on.

Work on Me First

Although it's true that there are times when we are merely bystanders in life's never-ending stream of head-on collisions, rarely are we completely innocent. More often than not, we do something to contribute to the problems we're experiencing.

People who are best at dialogue understand this simple fact and turn it into the principle, "Work on me first." They realize that not only are they likely to benefit by improving their own approach, but also that they're the only person they can work on anyway. As much as others may need to change, or we may *want* them to change, the only person we can continually inspire, prod and shape — with any degree of success — is the person in the mirror.

There's a certain irony embedded in this fact. People who believe they need to start with themselves do just that. As they work on themselves, they also become the most skilled at dialogue. So here's the irony. It's the *most* talented, not the least talented, who are continually trying to improve their dialogue skills.

Stay Focused

Skilled people Start with Heart. That is, they begin high-risk discussions with the right motives, and they stay focused no matter what happens.

They maintain focus in two ways. First, they're steely-eyed smart when it comes to knowing what they want. Despite constant invitations to slip away from their goals, they stick with them. Second, skilled people don't make Sucker's Choices (either/or choices). Unlike others who justify their unhealthy behavior by explaining that they had no choice but to fight or take flight, the dialogue-smart believe that dialogue, no matter the circumstances, is always an option.

Refocus Your Brain

You're speaking with someone who completely disagrees with you on a hot issue. How does all this goal stuff apply? As you begin the discussion, start by examining your motives. Going in, ask yourself what you really want.

Also, as the conversation unfolds and you find yourself starting to, say, defer to the boss or give your spouse the cold shoulder, pay attention to what's happening to your objectives. Step away from the interaction and look at yourself — much like an outsider. Once you call into question the shifting desires of your heart, you can make conscious choices to change them.

Return to Dialogue

Stop and ask yourself some questions that return you to dialogue:

- What do I really want for myself?
- What do I really want for others?
- What do I really want for the relationship?
- How would I behave if I really wanted these results? ●

Learn to Look

As people begin to feel unsafe, they start down one of two unhealthy paths. They move either to silence (withholding meaning from the pool) or to violence (trying to force meaning in the pool).

Silence almost always is done as a means of avoiding potential problems, and it always restricts the flow of

Ask Questions to Keep the Brain Focused

When we present our brain with a demanding question, our body sends precious blood to the parts of our brain that help us think and away from the parts of our body that help us take flight or begin a fight. Asking questions about what we really want reminds us of our goal and juices up our brain in a way that helps us keep focused.

Clarify what you don't want, add it to what you do want and ask your brain to start searching for healthy options to bring you to dialogue.

meaning. The three most common forms of silence are masking, avoiding and withdrawing. *Masking* consists of understating or selectively showing our true opinion. Sarcasm, sugarcoating and couching are some of the more popular forms. *Avoiding* involves steering completely away from sensitive subjects. We talk, but without addressing the real issues. *Withdrawing* means pulling out of a conversation altogether. We either exit the conversation or exit the room.

Violence consists of any verbal strategy that attempts to convince, control or compel others to accept your point of view. Methods range from name-calling and monologuing to making threats. The three most common forms are controlling, labeling and attacking. *Controlling* consists of coercing others to your way of thinking. This includes cutting others off, overstating your facts, speaking in absolutes, changing subjects or using directive questions to control the conversation. *Labeling* is putting a label on people or ideas so they can be dismissed under a general stereotype or category. *Attacking* includes belittling and threatening.

Look for Your Style Under Stress

When caught up in a crucial conversation, it's difficult to see exactly what's going on and why. When a discussion starts to become stressful, we often end up doing the exact opposite of what works. We turn to the less healthy components of our Style Under Stress.

To break from this insidious cycle, Learn to Look. Here's how:

- Learn to look at content *and* conditions.
- Look for when things become crucial.
- Learn to watch for safety problems.
- Look to see if others are moving toward silence or violence.
- Look for outbreaks of your Style Under Stress.

Most people toggle between holding back and becoming too forceful during stressful or crucial conversations. But typical behaviors can change. By identifying your Style Under Stress, you can make a special effort to avoid some of your silence or violence habits. Also, when you're in the middle of a crucial conversation, you can be more conscious of what to watch for. ●

Make It Safe

When others move to silence or violence, step out of the conversation and Make It Safe. When safety is restored, go back to the issue at hand and continue the dialogue. The key is to step out of the content of the conversation. Don't stay stuck in what's being said.

Next, decide which condition of safety is at risk. Here are some questions you can ask about each condition of safety:

- **Mutual Purpose.** Do others believe you care about their goals in this conversation? Do they trust your motives?
- **Mutual Respect.** Do others believe you respect them?

Apologize When Appropriate

When you've made a mistake that has hurt others (e.g., you didn't call your team to let them know that presentation plans were changed), start with an apology. When you've clearly violated respect, apologize. An apology is a statement that sincerely expresses your sorrow for your role in causing — or at least not preventing — pain or difficulty to others.

Contrast to Fix Misunderstanding

Sometimes people feel disrespected during crucial conversations even though we haven't done anything disrespectful. An apology isn't appropriate in these circumstances — it would be disingenuous to admit you were wrong when you weren't. How then can you rebuild Mutual Purpose or Mutual Respect in order to make it safe to get back to dialogue?

When others misunderstand either your purpose or your intent, step out of the argument and rebuild safely by using a skill called *Contrasting*.

Contrasting is a don't/do statement that:

- Addresses others' concerns that you don't respect them or that you have a malicious purpose (the *don't* part).
- Confirms your respect or clarifies your real purpose (the *do* part).

CRIB to Get to Mutual Purpose

When you are at cross-purposes, step out of the content of the conflict. Stop focusing on who thinks what.

Then CRIB your way back to Mutual Purpose:

- **Commit to seek Mutual Purpose.** Make a unilateral public commitment to stay in the conversation until you come up with something that serves everyone.
- **Recognize the purpose behind the strategy.** Ask people why they want what they're pushing for. Separate what they're demanding from the purpose it serves.
- **Invent a Mutual Purpose.** If after clarifying everyone's purposes you are still at odds, see if you can invent a higher or longer-term purpose that is more motivating than the ones that keep you in conflict.
- **Brainstorm new strategies.** Search for a solution that serves everyone.

Master My Stories

A Path to Action explains how emotions, thoughts and experiences lead to our actions. We observe, *we tell a story* and then we feel before we act. Since we *and only we* are telling the story, we can take back control of our own emotions by telling a different story. We now have a point of leverage or control. If we can find a way to control the stories we tell, by rethinking or retelling them, we can master our emotions and, therefore, master our crucial conversations.

If strong emotions are keeping you stuck in silence or violence, try the following tactics:

- **Notice your behavior.** If you find yourself moving away from dialogue, ask yourself what you're really doing. "Am I in some form of silence or violence?"
- **Get in touch with your feelings.** Learn to accurately identify the emotions behind your story. Ask yourself, "What emotions are encouraging me to act this way?"
- **Analyze your stories.** Question your conclusions and look for other possible explanations behind your story. Ask, "What story is creating these emotions?"
- **Get back to the facts.** Abandon your absolute certainty by distinguishing between hard facts and your invented story. Ask yourself, "What evidence do I have to support this story?"
- **Watch for clever stories.** Victim, Villain and Helpless stories sit at the top of the list. "Victim Stories" make us out to be innocent sufferers. When you tell a Victim Story, you ignore the role you played in the problem. With "Villain Stories," we overemphasize the other person's guilt. We automatically assume the worst possible motives while ignoring any possible good or neutral intentions a person might have. In "Helpless Stories," we make ourselves out to be powerless to do anything. These clever stories cause us problems. The dialogue-smart recognize that they're telling clever stories, stop and then do what it takes to tell a *useful* story. A useful story creates emotions that lead to healthy action — such as dialogue.

STATE My Path

Once you've worked on yourself to create the right condition for dialogue, you can then draw on five distinct skills that can help you talk about even the most sensitive topics. These five tools can be easily remembered with the acronym STATE.

When you have a tough message to share, or when you are so convinced of your own rightness that you may push too hard, remember to STATE your path:

- **Share your facts.** Start with the least controversial, most persuasive elements from your Path to Action.
- **Tell your story.** Explain what you're beginning to conclude.
- **Ask for others' paths.** Encourage others to share both their facts and their stories.
- **Talk tentatively.** State your story as a story — don't disguise it as a fact.
- **Encourage testing.** Make it safe for others to express differing or even opposing views.

Catch Yourself

When we believe strongly in a concept or a cause, our emotions kick in and we start trying to force our way onto others. As our emotions kick in, our ideas no longer flow into the pool. Instead, our thoughts shoot out of our mouths like water out of a raging fire hydrant. And others become defensive. When this happens, when our emotions turn our ideas into a harsh and painful stream of thoughts, our honest passion kills the argument rather than supports it.

Catch yourself before you launch into a monologue. Realize that if you're starting to feel indignant or if you can't figure out why others don't buy in, you need to recognize that you're starting to enter dangerous territory.

Back off your harsh and conclusive language, not your belief. Hold on to your belief; merely soften your approach.

Explore Others' Paths

To encourage the free flow of meaning and help others leave silence or violence behind, explore their Paths to Action. Start with an attitude of curiosity and patience. This helps restore safety.

Decide How to Decide

Here are the four common ways of making decisions and some dos and don'ts:

• **Command.** Decisions are made without involving others. Don't pass out orders like candy. When you face a command decision, ask which elements are flexible. When handing down an order, explain the reason behind the demand.

• **Consult.** Input is gathered from the group and then a subset decides. Don't pretend to consult. If you've already made up your mind, don't go through the charade of involving people only to do what you wanted to do all along. Announce what you're doing. Report your decision.

• **Vote.** An agreed-upon percentage swings the decision. Weigh the consequences. Know when to vote. Don't cop out with a vote. Votes should never replace patient analysis and healthy dialogue.

• **Consensus.** Everyone comes to an agreement and then supports the final decision. Don't force consensus onto everything. Don't pretend that everyone gets his or her first choice. Decisions should be based on merit, not on who offers up the options. When an idea doesn't work out, own the failure together.

AMPP

To encourage others to share their paths, use four powerful listening tools that can help make it safe for other people to speak frankly. These four skills are called power listening tools because they are best remembered with the acronym AMPP — *Ask, Mirror, Paraphrase* and *Prime*. Luckily, the tools work for both silence and violence games.

Here's how:

• **Ask to get things rolling.** Start by simply expressing interest in the other person's views.

• **Mirror to confirm feelings.** Increase safety by respectfully acknowledging the emotions people appear to be feeling.

• **Paraphrase to acknowledge the story.** As others begin to share part of their story, restate what you've heard to show not just that you understand, but also that it's safe for them to share what they're thinking.

• **Prime when you're getting nowhere.** If others continue to hold back, prime. Take your best guess at what they may be thinking and feeling.

Remember Your ABCs

It's now your turn to talk. But what if you disagree? Some of the other person's facts are wrong, and his or her stories are completely fouled up. Now what?

As you begin to share your views, remember:

• **Agree.** Agree when you do.

• **Build.** If others leave something out, agree where you do, then build.

• **Compare.** When you do differ significantly, don't suggest others are wrong. Compare your two views.

Don't turn differences into debates that lead to unhealthy relationships and bad results. ●

Move to Action

Having more meaning in the pool, even jointly owning it, doesn't guarantee that we all agree on what we're going to do with the meaning. For example, when teams or families meet and generate a host of ideas, they often fail to convert the ideas into action for two reasons:

• They have unclear expectations about how decisions will be made.

• They do a poor job of acting on the decisions they do make.

This can be dangerous. In fact, when people move from adding meaning to the pool to moving to action, it's a prime time for new challenges to arise.

Dialogue Is Not Decision Making

The two riskiest times in crucial conversations tend to be at the beginning and at the end. The beginning is risky because you have to find a way to create safety or else things go awry. The end is dicey because if you aren't careful about how you clarify the conclusion and decisions flowing from your Pool of Shared Meaning, you can run into violated expectations later on. This can happen in two ways.

First, people may not understand how decisions are going to be made.

The second problem with decision making occurs when no decision gets made. Decisions drag on forever.

Both of these problems are solved if, before making a decision, the people involved decide how to decide. Don't allow people to assume that dialogue is decision making. Dialogue is a process for getting all relevant meaning into a shared pool. That process, of course, involves everyone. However, simply because everyone is allowed to share their meaning — actually encouraged to share their meaning — doesn't mean they are then guaranteed to take part in making all the decisions. To avoid violated expectations, separate dialogue from decision making. Make it clear how decisions will be made — who will be involved and why.

When you're in a position of authority, you decide which method of decision making you'll use.

When there is no clear line of authority, deciding how to decide can be quite difficult. When decision-making authority is unclear, use your best dialogue skills to get meaning into the pool. Jointly decide how to decide.

The Four Methods of Decision Making

There are four common ways of making decisions: command, consult, vote and consensus. These four options represent increasing degrees of involvement. Increased involvement, of course, brings the benefit of increased commitment along with the curse of decreased decision-making efficiency. Savvy people choose the one that best suits their particular circumstances from among these four methods of decision making.

Determine *who* does *what* by *when*. Make the deliverables crystal clear. Set a *follow-up* time. Record the commitments and then follow up. Finally, hold people accountable to their promises.

Putting It All Together

After watching people at home and at work, as well as interviewing them, researchers have learned that most people make progress not by focusing on specific skills — at least to start with — but instead by applying two of these main principles.

Learn to Look and Make It Safe

The first lever for positive change is Learn to Look. That is, people who improve their dialogue skills continually ask themselves whether they're in or out of dialogue. This alone makes a huge difference. Even people who can't remember or never learned the skills of STATE or CRIB, etc., are able to benefit from this material by simply asking if they're falling into silence or violence. They may not know exactly how to fix the specific problem they're facing, but they do know that if they're not in dialogue, it can't be good. And then they try something to get back to dialogue. As it turns out, trying something is better than doing nothing.

So remember to ask the following important question: "Are we playing games or are we in dialogue?" It's a wonderful start.

Perhaps the most common way that the language of dialogue finds itself in everyday conversation is with the expression, "I think we've moved away from dialogue." This simple reminder helps people catch themselves early on, before the damage is severe.

The second lever for positive change is Make It Safe. Dialogue consists of the free flow of meaning and the No. 1 flow-stopper is a lack of safety. When you notice that you and others have moved away from dialogue, do something to make it safer. If you simply realize that your challenge is to make it safer, nine out of 10 times you'll intuitively do something that helps.

Sometimes you'll build safety by asking a question and showing interest in others' views. Apologies, smiles, even a request for a brief "time out" can help restore safety when things get dicey. The main idea is to make it safe. Do something to make others comfortable.

These two levers form the basis for recognizing, building and maintaining dialogue. When the concept of dialogue is introduced, these are the ideas most people can readily take in and apply to crucial conversations.

Yeah, But

People can think of a dozen reasons why these skills don't apply to the situation they care about. In truth, these dialogue skills apply to just about any problem you can imagine. However, since some are more difficult than others, here are two tough cases.

1. Sexual or Other Harassment. "It's not like anyone's blatantly harassing me or anything, but I don't like the way I'm being treated. How can I bring it up without making enemies?" Someone is making comments or gestures that you find offensive. The person does it seldom enough and he or she is subtle enough that you're not sure if HR or your boss can even help.

• **The Solution.** Tell the rest of the story. If you've tolerated the behavior for a long time before holding the conversation, own up to it. This may help you treat the individual like a reasonable, rational and decent person — even if some of his or her behavior doesn't fit this description.

When you feel a measure of respect for the other person, you're ready to begin. After establishing a Mutual Purpose for the exchange, STATE your path.

If you can be respectful and private but firm in this conversation, most problem behavior will stop. And remember, if the behavior is over the line, you shouldn't hesitate to contact HR to ensure that your rights and dignity are protected.

2. Failure to Live Up to Agreements. "Yeah, but my teammates are hypocrites. We get together and talk about all the ways we could improve, but then people don't do what they agreed to." The *worst* teams walk away from problems like these. In *good* teams, the boss eventually deals with problem behavior. In the *best* teams,

every team member is part of the system of accountability. If team members see others violate a team agreement, they speak up immediately and directly. It's dangerous to wait for or expect the boss to do what good teammates should do themselves.

• **The Solution.** If your teammate isn't doing what you think he or she should, it's up to you to speak up.

When teams try to rally around aggressive change or bold new initiatives, they need to be prepared to address the problem when a team member doesn't live up to the agreement. Success does not depend on perfect compliance with new expectations but on teammates who hold crucial conversations with one another when others appear to be reverting to old patterns. ●

Change Your Life

High-risk discussions don't come with notices and reminders. More often than not, they come as unwelcome surprises.

Emotions don't help much either. And, of course, crucial conversations are defined by their emotional characteristics. Your ability to pull yourself out of the content of a discussion and focus on the process is inversely proportional to your level of emotion. The more you care about what's happening, the less likely you are to think about how you're conducting yourself.

Between surprise and emotion, it's hard to know which is the bigger enemy of change. Both make it hard to remember to act in new ways.

Scripts

Scripts are another enemy of change. Scripts are prebundled phrases we use in common conversations; they form the very foundation of social habits and often make change almost impossible.

With a script, you know *both sides* of the conversation. The good news about scripts is that you don't have to give conversation much thought. The bad news is that the more scripted an interaction, the more difficult it is to pull yourself out of the routine and try something new.

Transfer Tips

Researchers examined 48 front-line supervisors who were learning how to hold crucial conversations. As they watched the trainees back at work, it became clear to them that only a few of them transferred what they had learned in the classroom back to their work site. The bad news is that most of them didn't change an iota. The good news is that some of them did. In fact, they used the new skills precisely as instructed.

The supervisors who found a way to apply the new skills taught the researchers the following four principles for turning ideas into action:

• **First, master the content.** That means not only do you have to be able to recognize what works and why, but you also have to generate new scripts of your own.

• **Second, master the skills.** You must be able to enact these new scripts in a way that is consistent with the supporting principles. As it turns out, simply understanding a concept isn't enough. While it's helpful, even necessary, to talk the talk, you have to be able to walk the walk. You have to be able to say the right words with the right tone and nonverbal actions.

• **Third, enhance your motive.** You must want to change. This means that you have to care enough about improving your crucial conversation skills to actually do something. You have to move from a passive sense that it would be a good idea to change to an active desire to seek opportunities. Ability without motive lies dormant and untapped.

• **Fourth, watch for cues.** To overcome surprise, emotion and scripts, you must recognize the call to action. This is usually people's biggest obstacle to change. Old stimuli generate old responses. If a problem doesn't cue your new skills, you'll return to your old habits without even realizing you missed a chance to try something new.

Pick a Conversation

Pick a relationship. Pick a conversation. Let others know that you're trying to do better, then give it a shot. When you blow it, admit it. Don't expect perfection; aim for progress. And when you succeed, celebrate your success. Take pleasure in knowing that you're improving and so are your relationships. Finally, when the chance arises, help others do the same. Help friends, loved ones and co-workers learn to master their own high-stakes discussions. Help strengthen organizations, solidify families, heal communities and shore up nations one person — one crucial conversation — at a time. ●

RECOMMENDED READING LIST

If you liked *Crucial Conversations*, you'll also like:

1. ***Crucial Confrontations* by Kerry Patterson, Joseph Grenny, Ron McMillan and Al Switzler** Research shows that most organizations are losing between 20 and 80 percent of their potential performance because they have not mastered crucial confrontations.
2. ***The Art of Woo* by G. Richard Shell and Mario Moussa** According to Shell and Moussa, "Woo" is the ability to win people over to your ideas without coercion, using relationship-based emotionally intelligent persuasion.
3. ***Influencer* by Kerry Patterson, Joseph Grenny, David Maxfield, Ron McMillan and Al Switzler** This book shows readers how seemingly "insignificant" people are making incredibly significant improvements in solving problems others would think impossible.